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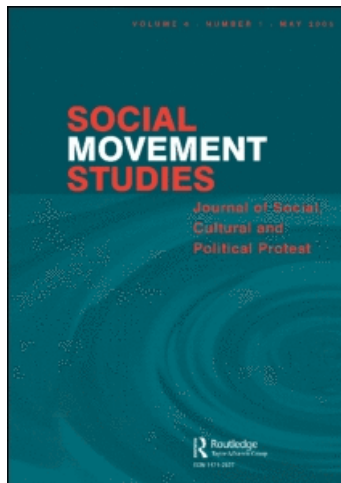
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# Translators and Transformers: International Inspiration and Exchange in Social Movements

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**ABSTRACT** *Cross-national traffic of ideas and practices contribute to the spread of collective action across borders. These processes have only recently become the subject of study and theoretical discussion. The theoretical models that have been developed so far fail to take into account the complex nature of intercultural communication. No attention is paid to problems of interpretation and translation that may occur and how potential adopters adapt foreign ideas and practices to a new context. Moreover, the central role of networks and existing (power) relations within these networks in this process is often neglected. Instead, I propose an empirically grounded, alternative model of the process, based on the cases of women's organizations against sexual violence in the Netherlands and Spain. My approach focuses on the processes of reception, recontextualization and the relations within the diffusion network. The reception of innovative repertoires was different for organizations that came across the example of pioneers at an early stage than for later groups. Early groups had less critical distance and more readily identified with pioneers than later observers. While some early followers aimed at 'literal' translation of an inspiring example, far more adaptations were made by the later groups. Innovative repertoires traveled through networks, but within these networks power struggles emerged over ownership and the right to transform.*

**KEY WORDS:** Diffusion, learning, international exchange, women's movements, The Netherlands, Spain

Collective action seldom emerges in splendid isolation. Ideas, strategies, models and organizational forms are spread between social movements through international contacts and are borrowed in different contexts (cf. Guidry *et al.*, 2000; Davis, 2002; Saguy, 2002). The movement against nuclear energy that emerged in 1971 in France developed remarkably successful tactics that soon traveled to neighboring countries Germany and Switzerland. Within a short period protest groups proliferated in different parts of Europe, using a similar discourse and sharing the symbol of a smiling sun that said no to nuclear energy (cf. Van der Heijden *et al.*, 1992). Another 'international demonstration effect' (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 92) occurred in Latin America during the 1980s, where the activities and successes of emerging human rights organizations inspired others to follow

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these examples. This also resulted in international networks that continued to exchange ideas and tactics to fight violations of human rights (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

Cross-national exchange and cooperation between social movements are well-known phenomena. The spread of innovative ideas and practices plays a central role in what McAdam *et al.* (2001, p. 331) call the process of *scale shift*. Tarrow (1998, p. 145) argues that cycles of protest cannot be explained without taking into account the role of 'demonstration effects'.

Social movement literature generally refers to these processes of cross-national exchange and learning between social movements as diffusion, a well-known concept in the field of communication and innovation studies (McAdam & Rucht, 1993; Soule, 2004). The concept of diffusion, and related words like flow, contagion or spill-over, suggest that objects of diffusion are easily transferable and translatable and that receivers will simply adopt an idea or practice when it is seen as appropriate or useful. The assumption of classic diffusion theory that communication occurs between members who operate within a social system does not hold for cross-national exchange between social movements. International diffusion between social movements entails communication between groups that operate within different political, cultural and social contexts. Perception, interpretation and translation play a central role in these processes. Both transmitters and receivers are actively engaged in framing processes to overcome differences between them that may hinder exchange (Snow & Benford, 1999; Chabot & Duyvendak, 2002; Roggeband, 2002).

Ideas and practices are transformed as they travel. Intercultural communication implies translation and hence transformation of the diffusion object. As Davis (2002, p. 243) notes, translation implies that 'the text is always articulated and in the process, meanings change and a new configuration of the original text emerges'.

Diffusion involves learning processes, as followers do not simply copy ideas but try to make sense of experiences elsewhere before importing them into their context. In light of that, I will focus on the interpretation and employment of innovative ideas by followers. Reinvention and learning make diffusion a dynamic process where ideas and practices are constantly 'in progress' as they get interpreted and translated in different contexts. This does not imply that new users always consciously adapt the ideas and practices of others. Their perception may well be that they are doing 'exactly the same thing'<sup>1</sup> as their counterparts elsewhere.

In this paper I will outline a theoretical framework that takes into account the complexity of cross-national exchange and learning processes and that explains how and why repertoires travel and are imported in very different contexts. The first element of this framework concerns the process of reception: How is a new idea or tactic perceived and evaluated? The second element is about the process of recontextualization: how actors deal with differences between the source of a new repertoire and themselves. The third element concerns the social relations between the actors involved, and power positions within the diffusion network.

Next I illustrate this model using the cases of the women's movement against sexual violence in two divergent contexts, namely the Netherlands and Spain (Roggeband, 2002, 2004). While the Netherlands can be considered an open and internationally oriented society with an accessible political system that fosters social movements, Spain was a closed society until the late 1970s. This was due to Franco's totalitarian regime, which prohibited any critical organization and censored all material that was seen to oppose the values promoted by the regime. This created major obstacles to active international exchange.

### The Process of Reception

Reception is a first central step in the diffusion process; the way an actor perceives and interprets a new repertoire is decisive for her willingness to consider using a foreign example.

The existing literature on diffusion between social movements stresses the importance of different channels through which actors receive information about new repertoires. Whether communication channels are relational or non-relational determines the rate and impact of diffusion (McAdam *et al.*, 2001; Soule, 2004). According to McAdam *et al.* (2001) diffusion may occur more rapidly and easily when pre-established links exist between actors. When no pre-existent ties are available brokerage is necessary to create new links and attribute similarity as a precondition to adoption (McAdam *et al.*, 2001, p. 334).

I will focus mainly on this latter type of diffusion and look at how and to what extent actors indeed try to create similarity between themselves and a foreign example. My claim is that the extent to which actors stress similarity as a precondition to the introduction of a new repertoire is related to the *temporal dimension* of the diffusion process.

Some individuals or groups may learn earlier about a new item than others. This can be related to the extension of their networks, their exposure to the media, their ability to communicate in foreign languages, and other resources (cf. Rogers, 1995, p. 167). Time is of central importance to the process since it affects *what* is received. While the diffusion item transforms through traveling, later observers come across a different example than early observers. Groups that learn about new repertoires at a later stage often also find more examples to learn from: not only the original source but also a range of other groups that have translated this example to their own context. This makes the reception processes of early and later observers very different.

Early or late reception also has important consequences for how actors perceive the new repertoire. Before actors consider applying a new repertoire they will first *compare* themselves and their context to that of the foreign example. They will ask themselves whether the 'problem' that foreign actors are trying to address or solve is also their problem. In the event that actors have just one example available, the attribution of similarity as a precondition is more important. Actors need to be convinced that they are dealing with a similar problem or that a tactic is useful. Legitimation is less of a problem when more examples are available. The fact that actors from different contexts apply a similar idea or practice creates a certain legitimacy. Since others have affirmed that a problem exists or that a tactic is useful, later followers will emphasize perceived differences. They will look for a practice that best suits their own context. So, distances between a source and early 'receivers' are more often bridged by creating existential sameness in experience, while later observers more readily affirm that differences may exist but that the new repertoire provides useful categories and models, or locally persuasive arguments for mobilization, recruitment and coalition building.

### Recontextualization

If groups or individuals have come across repertoires that they perceive as innovative, useful and attractive, how then are these ideas imported within the new context? How do actors deal with inevitable differences in cultural understandings, in contextual settings,

but also in available resources and skills? What strategies of translation and transformation are used?

Differences in contexts not only affect communication processes but also force actors to address the contextual boundedness of an inspiring example. Although adopters may perceive themselves as similar to their examples or otherwise identify with them, they have to decide whether and how inspiring ideas and practices suit their own context. There may be differences in cultural norms and rules, in political opportunities, and in available resources. This implies that potential adopters actively engage in processes of recontextualization in their efforts to implement new ideas and practices. Chabot and Duyvendak (2002, p. 707) have demonstrated how adoption of a foreign example requires a process of 'dislocation' – recognition that a foreign innovation may also work outside of its original context – and 'relocation' – experimenting with the innovation in a new setting. This requires cognitive steps and framing efforts by potential adopters.

Although resonance with the local context appears to be the obvious strategic choice of adopters, this is not necessarily the only option available. Actors may choose to introduce non-resonant issues, frames or practices. As Ferree (2003, p. 305) argues, local opportunities do not determine strategic choice in any mechanistic way, but 'the gradient of opportunity still allows actors to opt for radicalism rather than resonance'.

Different strategies of translation or transformation may be applied. Followers that aim to literally translate an example are often forced to create new terms within their language. For example, battering, incest and sexual harassment were all innovative concepts created by feminists to define different forms of sexual violence. The concept of sexual violence itself was also new. It related sexuality with violence, but also stressed that it was violence of one sex against the other sex.

Even if actors aim to translate a repertoire, interaction with their own cultural and political traditions will transform an imported idea or practice (Saguy, 2002, p. 263; Roggeband, 2002, 2004). Often followers will consciously look for adaptations to make the foreign repertoire fit into their cultural and political settings. These reinvention processes are more common among later followers than among earlier risers that intend to be more 'faithful' to the original repertoire. I discern three main reasons to adapt repertoires. First, available opportunities and resources may either facilitate or constrain the possibilities to import a foreign repertoire. Second, cultural critique of the original frame or its producers may inspire more locally resonant versions. Third, learning may help to refine local strategies and avoid pitfalls encountered elsewhere.

### **Relations: Networks and Power**

Social relations are not only important for diffusion to occur but continue to shape the process in later stages.

Networks are both the product and the central locus of diffusion. Ideas and practices spread through movement networks (cf. Oliver & Myers, 2003). This idea stresses the relational character of diffusion and points to another complexity of the process: how do relations and existing power imbalances between them affect the diffusion process and its outcomes? While Oliver & Myers (2003) associate diffusion with existing networks, diffusion also generates new networks. Visible innovations may attract activists who establish new ties with groups they perceive as interesting examples. Adopters, in turn, may become examples for others – either members of their network or new adherents.

Ideas may continue to circulate in this growing network; adjustments and reinventions may also become new objects of diffusion. This implies that the process does not end once an adopter has imported a transmitter's model, but should be conceptualized as a more continuous and dynamic process. A transmitter or innovator at some point may adopt a reinvention of their original model.

While networks facilitate diffusion, power relations within these networks may seriously hinder potential 'newcomers' from creatively adapting innovations. Innovators may claim ownership over their innovative repertoires and try to prevent any changes to their original idea. Innovators may also claim leadership or special positions and exclusive access to resources, the media, or the political arena. In some cases this may be accepted by followers, but it is more likely that such behavior results in disagreements and power conflicts within the network, causing splits or resulting in exclusion of some actors.

Over time, with the extension of the diffusion network, it becomes more difficult for innovators to maintain their power position. For later followers, who may have learned from an early riser instead of the original source, the innovator is often less 'sacrosanct' than for earlier risers. This makes it more difficult for the innovators to claim a central position in the network. Power conflicts may also be transferred to the local level, when a group that first emerged or that has created the strongest position in terms of resources or access claims leadership within the national context.

### *Empirical Illustrations*

In the following sections examples of how the issue of sexual violence reached the Dutch and Spanish women's movements will be used to illustrate the framework outlined above. These movements were inspired by examples from the USA and the UK (Roggeband, 2002, 2004).

In the late 1960s the 'new' issue of sexual violence emerged within feminist consciousness-raising groups. This soon became a central theme of the women's movement. In the early 1970s the first rape crisis centers were opened in the USA. These centers became national networking hubs for the growing movement, which also traveled to Europe (cf. Matthews, 1994, pp. 9–10). The theme of 'battering' first emerged somewhat accidentally in the UK. During a campaign to protest against the withdrawal of free school milk a group of women shared their experiences of violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1992, p. 26). In 1971, the group established Chiswick Women's Aid, a shelter for battered women that swiftly became a paradigmatic example for other European, American and Canadian feminists (cf. Dobash & Dobash, 1992, p. 12). From these first pioneers a broad movement against sexual violence emerged around issues ranging from sexism and pornography to violence in the workplace and in the family.

### **Reception: Perceiving and Interpreting Inspiration from Abroad**

The reception of the new repertoires from the USA and the UK to other countries occurred in different stages. Within a period of two or three years (in the mid-1970s), a group of *early risers* took over these new repertoires. By the 1980s, *later followers* used the examples of both pioneers and early risers to create new groups and services.



*Early Risers*

Dutch feminists were among the first to follow the examples of the American and British pioneers. In 1973, a group of feminist social workers planned to set up a rape crisis center following the example of American feminists, but ended up establishing a shelter when they came across the example of Chiswick:

Our original plan was to provide assistance to women, who had been raped, following the principles of the American rape crisis centers. But after visiting London [Chiswick Women's Aid], we decided to work with battered women. We observed how a shelter service can be run with minimal bureaucracy; yet make a maximal political impact. And we were very impressed by seeing how women were mobilized to handle their own situation. (Report of visit to Chiswick Women's Aid, 1974, IIAV Amsterdam<sup>2</sup>)

After their first visit a small delegation returned for an internship at the Chiswick shelter and in October 1974, only six months after their first visit, the Dutch group opened the first shelter on the European Continent.

The history of the first rape crisis center in the Netherlands, established in 1976, was very similar. In 1975, a group of feminists traveled to the USA, which they perceived as 'the only country where raped women are taken seriously' (Letter to the National Committee for the International Women's Year, 11 June 1975). To locate and contact groups in New York, Washington and Philadelphia, they consulted *Rape: The First Sourcebook for Women*, edited by the New York Radical Feminists (*Vrouwen tegen Verkrachting*, report of visit to the USA, November 1975). The National Committee for the International Women's Year supported the trip financially. The visit proved to be a success: 'when we return we know exactly what to do and start organizing' (annual report, JAC, 1975, p. 73). Within two months, the group opened the first rape crisis center on the European Continent, under a name borrowed from their American counterparts: Women against Rape (*Vrouwen tegen Verkrachting*).

These early risers obtained their information first through the media and then established direct personal contacts with the pioneer. Their on-site visits to study how the services functioned in practice, to see how the women were actually helped and to meet with the leaders of these initiatives, made a large impact and contributed to the positive evaluations of the model:

It was so impressive, especially Pizzey [initiator of Chiswick, CR]. Immediately I thought we should do the same thing. You could see it was such a good concept. The women managed everything themselves, which showed us we didn't have to do everything ourselves. (Martine van Rappard, co-founder first Dutch shelter)

The medium, a refuge for battered women, according to the Dutch followers communicated a strong political message that violence within marriage, until then a taboo subject, represented a serious social problem. The adopters of the Rape Crisis model underlined its 'radical political strategy' (VTV, report of visit to the USA, November 1975). In both cases, the followers perceived the examples as an important innovation breaking with the traditional 'patriarchal' service paradigm and challenging the social order.



The initiators of the Dutch shelter, mostly social workers, were convinced that the problem also existed in the Netherlands and that, as in the case of Chiswick, the problem would erupt and become visible as soon as a shelter service became available (minutes of meeting on 24 April 1974, IIAV).

### *Later Followers*

The organizers of Spanish initiatives against sexual violence can be characterized as late followers. Their belated emergence is due mainly to the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic structure. An important impetus for the Spanish movement against sexual violence was the International Tribunal of Crimes against Women, celebrated in 1976 in Brussels shortly after the death of Dictator Franco. During this meeting, women from many parts of the world exchanged experiences of their struggles to end violence against women. The Spanish participants returned 'inspired and euphoric, full of energy and power' (Escario *et al.*, 1996, p. 286) and began to study foreign examples more closely, mainly by reading the available literature. An exception to this was the Barcelona-based *Grup Alba* that visited several shelters in the UK in 1981. After this visit they planned to open a similar service in Barcelona, but this intention was hampered by a lack of resources. After the national government established a funding program to support women's services in 1983, a first shelter was opened in Madrid. *Grup Alba* received funding to visit shelters in France, Denmark and the UK, and opened a shelter in Barcelona in 1985.

The first rape crisis centers were opened in 1984 in Barcelona and Madrid. Since the initiators lacked resources to visit foreign examples, the organization of the rape crisis centers was based on the literature.

We knew of similar groups in different European countries, but we did not have the means to travel. That was really a pity because I think international exchange and cooperation would have helped us a lot. (Tina Alarcon, co-founder of *Asistencia a Mujeres Violadas*, Madrid)

Interestingly enough, we can also find examples of late followers in the Netherlands. In 1982, a group in Amsterdam started a new project for a twenty-four-hour hotline modeled on the American crisis hotlines, developed in the early 1970s:

There was no immediate help available for victims of rape. We liked the American idea of a 24-hour service, that you could call whenever you needed it. (Rozemarijn Esselink, co-founder of *Tegen Haar Wil* (Against Her Will))

In laying the groundwork for this service, the group consulted 'a volume of American literature', which explained how hotlines functioned and provided practical information (*Stichting Tegen Haar Wil, Je zou vergeten hoe het was*, 1992, p. 8). The project's name refers to the title of Susan Brownmiller's book, *Against Our Will*.

In contrast with the early followers, which were based on just one example, later followers had a far wider range of examples available. This stimulated the groups to compare and think what example would best fit their context.

It strikes us to see the differences [between shelter services in various countries]. For instance, in Denmark the shelter is run basically with volunteers, whereas the shelter in Marseille has an interdisciplinary team of professionals working with the women and their children. (*Grup Alba*, report of visit to France, Denmark and the United Kingdom, 1985, archive of Odila Pérez, co-founder of *Grup Alba*)

Founders of the Madrid shelter service argued that the original example of Chiswick was not very applicable in the Spanish context.

The initiative taken almost a decade ago in England to create, maintain and manage shelter services, shows important differences with the model that can be applied in Spain. This is due to the specific characteristics of our country and the social-economic conditions of Spanish women. [...] To use the model of shelters in Spain, we need to adapt it in three areas 1) subsidies and economic resources, 2) characteristics of personnel and services, and 3) management of the houses. (Elu & García Pérez, 1984)

Also, the late followers felt more freedom to draw from examples outside of the women's movement. For instance, the Dutch group, which drew on the models of hotlines, also turned to models from the movement against nuclear energy:

The organization of our 24 hours hotline was inspired by movement against nuclear energy. They work with small cells and we used that principle in establishing *Tegen Haar Wil*. (Martijn van der Kroef, Coordinator of *Tegen Haar Wil*)

So, in general, late followers maintained more distance towards what they perceived as inspiring examples and more readily brought together elements of different examples.

### **Recontextualization: Continuities and Adaptations**

Followers imported ideas to their own context. How did they translate and modify the ideas and practices observed elsewhere? It is striking to see that there was a strong consensus about the definition of the problem and its causes, but that far more adaptations were made to the tactics, strategies and organizational forms.

#### *Defining the Problem*

Although the Dutch and Spanish organizations in this study emerged at different times and did not always model themselves on the same examples, there is a striking continuity in the initial problem definitions used by the pioneers and their different followers. This can be explained by the universal assumptions of these definitions. Almost invariably, activists from different branches argued that violence is a universal phenomenon rooted in patriarchal structures:

In all patriarchal societies women have a subordinated position. These societies are shaped by sexual hierarchy and violence from one sex against the other. Violence

is an expression of this situation of discrimination of women and the power of men. From this structural perspective, violence is happening in all social classes, in all economic ranks, in all cultural and ideological sectors. (Conclusions, Conference on Women and Violence, Madrid, 1984<sup>3</sup>)

This comprehensive explanation was an important facilitating factor in the spread of this problem definition. Activists from different contexts perceived their problems as similar:

It seems to us that the problem of battering that our sisters in England, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands are fighting against, has similar conditions and characteristics in our country. (Conclusions, First Conference on Women and Social Services, 1984, p. 150)

This perception of similarity was an important mechanism to identify with women elsewhere and adopt their problem definitions.

### *Adapting Repertoires*

While the very early followers of the British and American pioneers aimed at an almost direct translation of the models studied, later followers were more critical of these examples and applied them differently.

The early followers of the battered women's movement and the anti-rape movement adopted the models of the shelters and rape crisis centers almost immediately and with minor adaptations. The proposed solutions to battering and rape of their British and American counterparts were seen as very adequate. Dutch feminists embraced the basic principles of the shelter service: self-help, very popular within the Anglo-Saxon culture, and a volunteering and collectivist structure that both fitted well in the Dutch social movement culture. To underline the continuity between their source of inspiration and themselves the Dutch shelter activists translated the texts of Chiswick founder Pizzey and her co-workers under the name of the Dutch shelter. They saw the Chiswick principles as a means of creating equality between workers and residents, and to 'encourage women to become involved in the running of the household and make their own personal decisions' (*Blijf van m'n lijf*, jaarverslag, 1974–75, p. 5). The Chiswick principles also facilitated adoption, since these lowered the costs of the initiative and made it possible to organize without external resources.

For Spanish feminists, *political opportunities* and *available resources* were an important reason to reframe the basic principles of volunteering and horizontal organizing. To a certain extent, adaptations were necessary to fulfill various requirements for state funding. These requirements called for more formal organizational structures and a professional staff. Although Spanish feminists saw this as an important obstacle to implementing the self-help model of the original shelters, they had no alternative funding, and were also quite eager to make the state responsible for fighting sexual violence. Thus, the founders of the Spanish shelters had to adapt the original frame and legitimated this modification by arguing that volunteering is not compatible with the feminist principle of economic independence of women. To safeguard the principles of self-help and equality

between workers and residents, while working with a professional staff, it was argued that these professionals had to be feminists:

It is import that the shelters be based on feminist principles. [...] We think, therefore, that the shelters should be managed and controlled by feminists, should be non-hierarchical and that those affected should be the ones who run the house and make the daily decisions. (First Conference on Women and Social Services, Madrid, 1984, p. 57)

The Dutch late follower *Tegen Haar Wil* adapted the original frame to the changing political context. While the early anti-rape organizations defined themselves as anti-state and autonomous (cf. Bleich *et al.*, 1982, p. 104; Matthews, 1994, p. xii), this later group decided to make use of favorable political opportunities and applied for state funding. Also, the group accepted the invitation of the local authorities to become a member of an advisory committee on sexual violence. These adaptations caused huge disagreements within the group, as some activists feared co-optation. The conflict was settled by establishing a section dedicated to radical action, to stress the group's role as a critical outsider (Minutes of meeting, November 1984, IIAV Amsterdam).

Other adaptations were inspired by *cultural critique* of the original frame or its producers. For instance, the Spanish anti-rape organization *Comisión Anti Agresiones* first adopted American slogans, but later started to criticize some of the ideas of their American counterparts:

When the [American] slogans reached us we adopted these without much reflection, because it were transcendent slogans, like 'No rape without answer'; 'All men are potential rapists'; 'When a woman says no, she means no' ... Then later came the reflection about what is behind these slogans. We started to read and discuss, and that is when we started to expurgate the slogans. (interview with Cristina Garaizabal, *Comisión Anti Agresiones*, Madrid)

The group wanted to avoid some of 'the puritan tendencies' in the American discussion that defined (hetero)sexuality as the problem (MacKinnon, 1982). Instead, they argued that Spain needed sexual liberation to make a break with its conservative, puritan past: 'We should not leave sexuality for more secure times, but search for our pleasure now and meanwhile fight against the concrete forms of sexual violence' (Jornadas Anti Agresiones, Santiago de Compostela, 1988, archivo *Comisión Anti Agresiones*, Madrid). So, the *Comisión Anti Agresiones* produced an alternative frame that in its view was more adequate for the Spanish context.

*Learning experiences* also led to adaptations; lessons from elsewhere helped to refine local strategies. The struggle against pornography is a case in point. Inspired by US feminism, pornography became a central issue in the Dutch women's movement in the late 1970s. Pornography was depicted as the root of violence against women. American anti-pornography feminists introduced an innovative tactic to use the legal system for women's protection, assigning pornography to the realm of sex discrimination. Although Dutch legislation lacked any provisions for penalizing gender discrimination, the strategy was adopted by a Dutch group called Women against Pornography (*Vrouwen tegen porno*). In 1981, the group successfully requested the rightist government to withdraw a bill

to liberalize pornography regulations. This outraged liberal and leftist political parties who accused the women's movement of joining ranks with the enemy. A few years later, when these parties presented a new bill for more liberal pornography laws, they encountered no feminist opposition. This change of strategy can only be understood as lesson drawing from controversies about the same issue that had arisen in the meantime in the USA. US feminists aligned with conservative forces to pass an ordinance that allowed any woman to file a civil suit against makers or distributors of pornography. This caused major conflicts and schisms within the American women's movement, ending in divisions and demobilization. Dutch feminists feared that something similar would occur in the Netherlands:

In the US, the coalition between radical feminists and the right (Moral Majority) resulted in an ordinance to penalize pornography in the city of Indianapolis. It looks as though the same is going to happen in Minneapolis. The article 'Sisterhood is powerful' shows the dangers of this collaboration with a powerful anti-feminist movement. If the Christian right gets the opportunity to eliminate the women's movement, it certainly will. (Nonja, in *Vrouwenweekblad*, 5 October 1984)

Thus, strategies and organizational models traveled to various contexts and were used by local feminists to shape their own practices. Some ideas were taken almost literally; more often, however, concepts and models were modified by followers. I found that problem definitions were less subject to adaptations than action repertoires and organizational models. This may be explained by the universal character of the problem definition which, in principle, requires no local adaptation. However, in looking for solutions to the problem, feminists had to engage their context. The demands of the environment, the available resources and the cultural climate had to be dealt with. The cases of the Spanish and Dutch women's movements against sexual violence make clear that, while they identified the actors identified with the spirit and objectives of the movements as inspiring examples, they also needed local appropriation. What motivated these transformations can be ascribed to different factors: practical or political factors, the critical evaluations of practices developed, or learning experiences. Interestingly, I found that followers often strategically framed their modifications in accordance with the original frame and emphasized that their adaptations did not threaten the basic principles of the original model.

### **Relations: Facilitation and Control**

In all of the cases studied, the initiative to study and visit a foreign group or practice was taken by the 'followers'. So, instead of a sender–receiver model, the findings suggest a model of active 'seekers'.

An important motor behind this process of seeking and exchange was the internationalist ideal of feminism. Feminist activists viewed international solidarity as an important means of creating a strong political force. This ideal is well voiced by Diane Russell, one of the organizers of the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women:

SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL! INTERNATIONAL SISTERHOOD IS MORE POWERFUL! This slogan captures well one of the assumptions of those who

organized the International Tribunal. Our struggle must not only be conducted within nations but cross national boundaries. (Russell & Van de Ven, 1984, p. 12)

While no pre-established ties existed between early followers and the innovator, the international orientation helped to build new ties. Also, new networks were generated as early followers became new examples for later followers. The Dutch shelter-service, for instance, received visits from German and Belgium feminists interested in creating new shelters.

Both Dutch and Spanish feminists rearticulated and transformed ideas and practices from foreign examples to make them work within their own contexts, but these transformations sometimes met with opposition from networks members.

Pioneer Chiswick, whose founder Erin Pizzey had actively worked to make the problem of battering visible both in Britain and the rest Europe, started to claim control and power in Women's Aid, the national network of shelter-services. Pizzey wished to maintain exclusive access to funds donated by the public (Dobash & Dobash, 1992, p. 33), but also wanted to set the criteria for the functioning of shelters. She opposed what she perceived as feminist and lesbian invasions of the shelter groups. In a letter to the media, Chiswick positioned itself as the only 'real' shelter and intended to discredit other shelters:

We are particularly worried and unhappy that there are groups who seem to be trying to use Women's Aid as a platform for Women's Liberation and Gay Women's Liberation. We would strongly advise Social Services and Housing Departments to look very carefully at the groups in their areas who are offering to set up refuge before giving them your support. (Cited in Schechter, 1982, p. 154)

This caused a split within the emerging network of shelters. Some shelters stayed loyal to the pioneering shelter, but the majority sought independence. Chiswick also attempted to 'control' its foreign followers and proclaimed itself as coordinator of the different initiatives emerging in Europe (letter of Pizzey to Dutch shelter, 6 May 1975, archives of *Blijf van mijn lijf*, Amsterdam).

Over time, pioneer Chiswick was not able to maintain its position of control. Initially the Chiswick activists kept close contact with their Dutch followers and even visited the shelter twice. In part this was inspired by feelings of friendship and solidarity. However, Pizzey also criticized the Dutch shelter for not having special facilities for the children, and, later, for not sharing Pizzey's vision that victims of battering, because of their education and experiences, were more prone to violence than other women.<sup>4</sup> This made the Dutch group decide to loosen their contacts with Chiswick.

Power conflict also emerged among followers. For example, the initiators of the first Dutch shelter claimed the power to select which other Dutch followers could use the same name and become members of the national network. When one of the groups in the network decided to give up the volunteering principle and pay its workers, the Amsterdam group demanded that this 'dissident' group be excluded from participating in the network's application for state funding.

Exclusion is the most severe form of repression. Adaptations often received more subtle criticisms or interventions. The Spanish choice to pay workers of the shelter services was criticized by foreign counterparts as 'selling out' or opting for a non-feminist model.



So diffusion networks not only represented the ideal of (international) solidarity but also were places of competition between organizations. Some organizations claimed special positions and exclusive access to resources, the media, or the political arena.

## Conclusions

I have proposed a framework that emphasizes the dynamic and relational nature of international diffusion processes and highlights three basic elements: reception, recontextualization and relations.

*Reception* of the innovative ideas and practices was different for organizations that came across the example of pioneers at an early stage than for later groups. Early followers stressed the innovative character and political relevance of the example. Early groups established personal contact with the pioneer, which stimulated identification and persuaded them to translate the example to their own context. Differences in context or actors were neglected or minimized. They perceived an urgent need for solidarity in creating an international movement to combat the problem of violence. Although this latter vision was shared by later followers, they adopted a more critical stance. One important explanation for this difference in attitude is that later groups had a range of examples available. This stimulated them to compare between different translations, including the pioneer, which created more distance and freedom to search for their own alternative.

Differences in reception result in different processes of *recontextualization*. Early adopters aimed at a 'literal translation' of an inspiring example. As one of the early Dutch followers stated, they planned to do 'the same thing'. However, as I have argued, a translation always implies a transformation of the object of diffusion as adopters import an idea in a new context and as they may differ in opinions, positions and resources with the example organization. This results in mainly practical adaptations. Later, followers more strongly focus on the need to adapt the example to their context. Interestingly, the empirical examples reveal that both early risers and late followers felt little need to adapt the definition of the underlying problem of violence. They perceived that the problems of battering and rape were similar in each context and that these were rooted in the transcending patriarchal structure. This perceived similarity, however, did not result in the same strategy. The cases demonstrate how activists incorporated the ideas and practices of their examples, in interaction with the traditions and settings of their context. They adapted the solutions proposed for practical or political reasons, as a result of critical evaluations of foreign examples that did not fit well into the cultural context, or due to learning experiences. The process of importing a new idea or model in another context required a *strategic framing effort*. Activists framed their adaptation in line with the original frame, as if to stress the continuity or similarity within the international movement. Thus, although 'recontextualization and rearticulation' (Davis, 2002, p. 243) are inherent to the process of diffusion, activists emphasize that their version of a shelter or a rape crisis center is either 'the same thing' or can be classified under the same label.

Relations and positions within the emerging diffusion network affect the process of adaptation. In some cases pioneering actors claim power to evaluate which actors meet the criteria for joining a national or international network. In other cases transformations that are perceived as damaging the 'original' model are criticized



or neglected. The ideal of a shared project is actively promoted, and differences between actors and contexts are often neglected or minimized. However, competition over resources and access is a serious threat to international solidarity. So, international networks not only facilitate diffusion but are also used as a means of controlling this process.

## Notes

1. This phrase was used in one of the interviews I held with a Dutch feminist activist who borrowed the idea of a shelter service for battered women from the British pioneer Chiswick.
2. International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement contains material of most women's organisations in the Netherlands.
3. Material found in the Documentation Centre of the Women's Institute in Madrid.
4. Information from interviews with Martine van Rappard en Noor van Crevel, initiators of first Dutch Shelter service. For a description of Pizzey's vision, see Dobash and Dobash (1992, pp. 115–116).

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